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ACTION ARA-01

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-15	AID-01	AMAD-01	CA-02	CIAE-00	SJK-01
	C-01	DODE-00	DS-00	EB-01	HA-09	H-01	INRE-00
	INR-01	L-03	ADS-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OCS-06	OMB-01
	PA-01	PM-01	PRS-01	P-01	SNP-01	SP-01	SSO-00
	SS-01	TRSE-00	T-01	USIE-00	DTC-01	/053W	
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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8012
INFO USCINCSO QUARRY HTS PM IMMEDIATE
ARA COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 01136

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PREL, PGOV, ASEC, CASC, MASS, VE
SUBJECT: INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT WHY THE FEBRUARY 4
ATTEMPTED COUP OCCURRED

REF: COUP SITREPS

1. C - ENTIRE TEXT.
2. REBEL TROOPS UNDER THEIR COMMANDERS (ALL, IT SEEMS, LT. COLS. AND BELOW) ARE STILL UNDER ARMS IN SEVERAL CITIES. EVEN IN CARACAS, ISOLATED POCKETS OF REBEL RESISTANCE REMAIN AT MID-DAY. IN SHORT, IT'S NOT OVER.

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BUT WE ASSUME THAT PRESIDENT PEREZ AND THE FORCES OF CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER WILL WIN, AND SOON. ONLY THEN ARE THE FULL FACTS, INCLUDING WHAT MOTIVATED THE PERPETRATORS OF THE COUP ATTEMPT, LIKELY TO BE AVAILABLE. THIS HAS NOT PREVENTED THE VENEZUELAN'S THEMSELVES FROM LAUNCHING AN ORGY OF SELF-CRITICISM AND SELF-ANALYSIS -- IN FACT, TV COMMENTATORS AND THEIR INTERVIEW SUBJECTS HAVE ALREADY BEGUN THE PROCESS.

3. OUR OWN FIRST CUT AT AN ASSESSMENT FOLLOWS. FIRST, WE NOTE THAT THIS WAS A CONSPIRACY INVOLVING A LIMITED NUMBER

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REVIEW AUTHORITY: OSCAR J OLSON
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OF UNITS AND OFFICERS, FROM PERHAPS ONLY THREE OR FOUR BATTALIONS. THOSE INVOLVED MAY HAVE HOPED FOR PUBLIC SUPPORT, BUT THEY RECEIVED LITTLE OR NONE (ALTHOUGH WE HAVE HEARD SOME ANECDOTES ABOUT BARRIO RESIDENTS "CELEBRATING" THE COUP WHEN IT STILL APPEARED LIKELY TO SUCCEED). HAD THEY SUCCEEDED IN KILLING CAP -- THEIR ONLY REAL CHANCE OF EVEN TEMPORARY VICTORY -- THE PLOTTERS WOULD HAVE HAD DIFFICULTY CONSOLIDATING POWER AND RULING THE COUNTRY.

4. THE OFFICERS' MOTIVATION, ASIDE FROM SHEER AMBITION, PROBABLY DERIVED FROM A COMBINATION OF FACTORS (WHOSE PRECISE BALANCE WE CANNOT YET DETERMINE) INCLUDING:

-- DISSATISFACTION WITH THEIR DIFFICULT ECONOMIC CONDITION. YOUNGER OFFICERS CANNOT AFFORD THE HOUSES, SCHOOLS, CARS, AND OTHER LUXURIES THAT THE OLDER GENERATION RECEIVED ROUTINELY, AND THEY BITTERLY RESENT IT.

-- CONTEMPT FOR THE "ROTTEN" POLITICAL SYSTEM.

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-- (POSSIBLE) CONCERN ABOUT ONGOING ATTEMPTS TO REDEFINE THE MILITARY'S TRADITIONAL MISSION TO INCLUDE FORMER POLICE FUNCTIONS.

-- DISLIKE FOR THE GOV'S PERCEIVED INCOMPETENCE IN HANDLING FRONTIER PROBLEMS WITH NEIGHBORS COLOMBIA AND BRAZIL, WHICH MIGHT SEEM TO THREATEN VENEZUELAN SOVEREIGNTY AND WHICH HAVE ASSUMED A MUCH HIGHER PROFILE HERE IN THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS.

5. WE HAVE NO INDICATION THAT IDEOLOGY PLAYED ANY SIGNIFICANT ROLE, EXCEPT, POSSIBLY, THE ANTI-CORRUPTION CAUSE. MORE IMPORTANT WOULD BE THE UNEXPECTED TALENT FOR INTRIGUE EVIDENTLY POSSESSED BY SEVERAL KEY YOUNG OFFICERS -- THE GOV HAS ELABORATE INTELLIGENCE SERVICES DESIGNED INTER ALIA TO DETECT SUCH PLANS, AND THEY FAILED COMPLETELY UNLESS (AS WE MAY FIND) SOME LAST MINUTE WARNING MAY HAVE HELPED CAP SURVIVE. THE APPARENT COUP LEADER, LT. COL. HUGO CHAVEZ, IS A TOUGH ARMOR-PARACHUTIST OFFICER WHO ESCAPED PUNISHMENT AFTER INVOLVEMENT IN COUP "TALK" IN 1989-1990. (MORE ON CHAVEZ FOLLOWS SEPTTEL.)

6. THE OAS' PERCEIVED DIFFICULTY IN ENFORCING ITS FIAT IN

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RELATIVELY PRIMITIVE "POST-COUP" HAITI MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE COUP PLOTTERS' HOPE THAT THEY COULD WITHSTAND THE LIKELY INTERNATIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR ACTION. (CAP'S OWN INTENSE CONCERN ABOUT HAITI LOOKS MORE EXPLICABLE IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S EVENTS.)

7. WE WOULD JUDGE A NEAR-TERM REPETITION OF THIS COUP
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ATTEMPT AS UNLIKELY, GIVEN ITS MASSIVE, UNANIMOUS
REPUDIATION BOTH AT HOME AND ABROAD, THE SEVERITY WITH
WHICH THE COUP PLOTTERS ARE LIKELY TO BE TREATED, AND THE
MEASURES TO RAISE MILITARY LIVING STANDARDS WHICH THE GOV
IS LIKELY TO TAKE IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. SKOL

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